

INFRASPECIFIC CATEGORIES OF *HIBISCUS MOSCHEUTOS*
(MALVACEAE) IN TEXAS

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Blanchard (2008) treated *Hibiscus moscheutos* as having two infraspecific categories: subsp. *moscheutos* and subsp. *lasiocarpus* (Cav.) O.J. Blanchard. Correll and Johnston (1970), in their compendium of the Flora of Texas, treated these as species, distinguishing between these with the following couplet:

1. Leaves commonly elliptic-lanceolate and broadly cuneate to rounded at base, with age usually becoming glabrous above, gray-pannose beneath; capsules glabrous**H. moscheutos**
1. Leaves ovate to ovate-lanceolate, rounded to cordate at base, permanently pubescent on both surfaces; capsules more or less pubescent.....**H. lasiocarpus**

In my evaluation of the taxa concerned for my Atlas of Texas Plants (Turner et al. 2003), I concluded that the populational variation used to separate the two taxa in Texas was weak at best and treated the two taxa as but part of a widespread highly variable *H. moscheutos*.

Appearance of Blanchard's paper led me to re-examine the problem from his perspective. Blanchard notes that in the typical subspecies "the capsules are glabrous and dark brownish black, the bracts of the involucrel usually lack cilia, and the upper leaf surface is usually glabrous;" in subspecies *lasiocarpus* "the capsules are variously pubescent so that the dark surface is more or less obscured, the bracts of the involucrel are usually ciliate, and the upper leaf surfaces are usually pubescent." One can hardly be unaware of the "usually" factor in his comparisons. Which is certainly true for the Texas plants I examined, hence my reluctance to recognize two taxa for the state.

My re-examination of the complex from throughout the United States leads me to agree with Blanchard's biological assessment of the entities concerned: there indeed appears to be two intergrading taxa, this expressed succinctly by Blanchard:

The eastern, glabrous-fruited *Hibiscus moscheutos* subsp. *moscheutos* is distributed from New Hampshire to Florida and westward, where it gives way to the more western pubescent-fruited subspecies *lasiocarpus* in a narrow zone that extends from southern Illinois and Indiana to coastal Mississippi and Alabama.

My examination of specimens on file at LL-TEX (Figs. 1, 2, the various intergrades not mapped) suggests that such is the case, but perhaps not as clearly so as suggested by Blanchard. This is especially true for eastern Texas and most of Louisiana where the recognition of this or that taxon might be decided with whim, hence my reluctance to accept their recognition in Turner et al. (2003), as noted above.

Finally, a choice exists regarding infraspecific rank. Turner and Nesom (2000) and Nesom and Lipscomb (2005) noted that the ICBN (2000 and prior) appeared to support the initial use of "variety," followed by "subspecies" as a mechanism for clustering closely related varieties. The most recent ICBN (2006, Article 4.2, Note 1) responded by explicitly noting that designation of infraspecific taxa may begin with either rank. It has been the consistent practice in Texas botanical nomenclature to use varietal rank to first recognize distinct but intergrading entities.

Following the rationale above, I have opted to treat *H. m.* subsp. *lasiocarpus* at the varietal level, as follows:

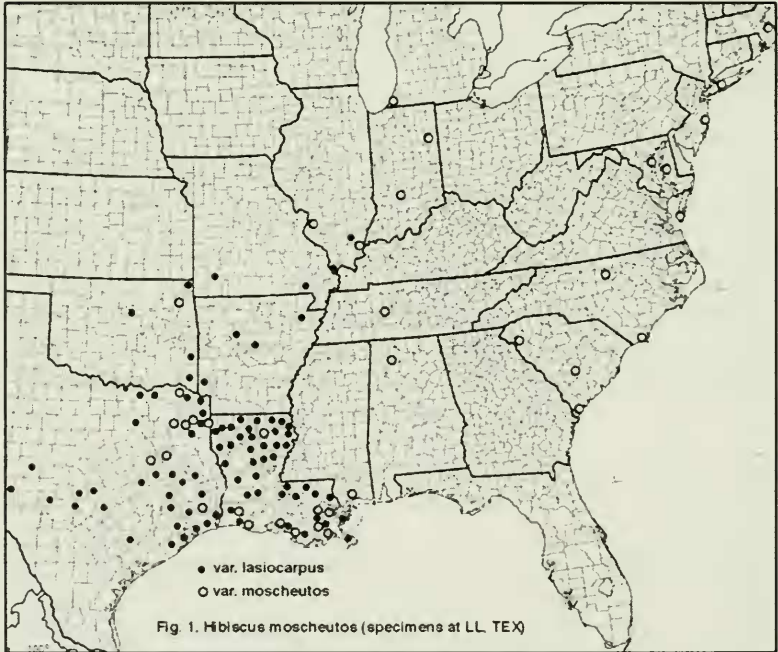
Hibiscus moscheutos var. *lasiocarpus* (Cav.) B.L. Turner, **stat. nov.**
Based upon *Hibiscus lasiocarpus* Cav., Diss. 3: 159. 1787.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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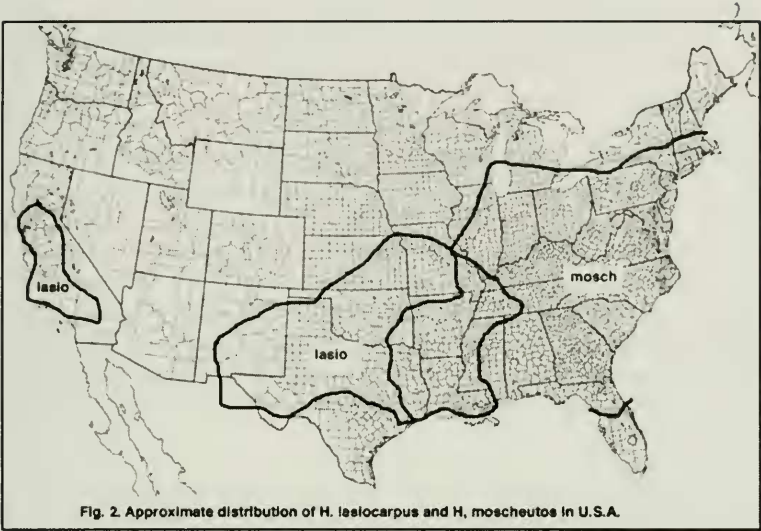


Fig. 2. Approximate distribution of *H. lasiocarpus* and *H. moscheutos* in U.S.A.